



HACKERS





HACKERS — A Hi-Tech Trip Down The Information Super-Highway

When the first "backsploitation" film, *WarGames*,¹ appeared in 1983, its harrowing scenario of a teen-age computer hacker tapping into a defense super-computer no doubt seemed a bit far-fetched to many. My, how times have changed. Although lawmakers have not yet been able to effectively police the internet, "governments worldwide have introduced new legislation to combat online gangsters!"¹ No longer are young computer aficionados seen as "nerds." With online activities ranging from mere practical jokes to outright sabotage, the ability to hack — and hack well — has replaced reality-based prankism as the new devious right of passage. Hackers now have one distinct advantage over their 80's counterparts: the ability to collaborate online with other hackers and "form a global underground, a subculture with its own ethics, rules and folklore."² This is the subculture director Iain Softley chose to explore with the techno thriller *Hackers*. Fresh from his success with his debut film, 1994's *Backbeat* (which followed the relationship of John Lennon with "fifth Beatle" Stu Sutcliffe), Softley found Rafael Moreu's *Hackers* script appealing in that "the environment [the hackers] inhabit resembles the world of their imagination, and you have an opportunity to show their dreams and their fantasies in the movie settings."² Softley explains his view on the subject: "I'm interested in subcultures at the point where they

break through and become difficult for the mainstream culture to ignore. In *Backbeat*, the backdrop was pop culture and how it was about to break through and become the dominant cultural phenomenon [and] I get a sense that that is happening now with the computer underground, particularly with all the interest in the internet and online communication."³ "We're in a new era," Softley continues. "This is uncharted territory and I think hackers see themselves as modern-day explorers...Laws are being passed that are trying to define a world that's changing so quickly, it's difficult to keep up. What's legal and what is illegal? Who is the criminal? The irony is that the biggest crime — one that could unravel the whole of modern society — could conceivably be perpetrated by a kid in his bedroom with some fairly basic equipment. It's funny, but there's an inescapably serious side to it."³



TRIPPY THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

The music chosen for the film reflects the fast-paced, almost psychedelic feel of the hacker subculture. According to Softley: "The majority of the music in *Hackers* is trance and rave...I really believe that a new wave of ambient and dance music is about to experience a huge commercial breakthrough in the U.S. The bands that I am using — Leftfield, Massive Attack, the Prodigy, Orbital and Underworld — are already stars within this subculture. They provide a driving dance beat,

which is fun to cut scenes to...Classic rock would not have worked well with this subject matter. The music has to have a trippy feel to it, because surfing the internet can be a very hallucinogenic experience for kids. Both the computer and rave music cultures are looking for reality outside the mainstream. They both revert to the hippy culture of the 60s by trying to seek out unexplored territories and parallel realities."⁴



TECH'S RAY VISION

Visually, Softley tried to portray the dual worlds of online and offline through the eyes of his teen hackers. "They imagine the world as being a labyrinth of computer connections that they surf through," he said, "so in the movie, we're going to look at Manhattan visually as a city of text and data and computer circuitry. By a photographic treatment, you will see the image of the city as a network of electronic fiber optics."⁵ "[The subculture] has a very kaleidoscope look," he added, "and I wanted the film to reflect that."² In order to blur the line between reality and fantasy, "we made the computer look like a city and the city look like a computer," Softley says. "In the movie, the parallel world of

computers appears just as real as the everyday world. The real and the imaginary are superimposed on one another...I wanted to show how hackers have a sort of second sight, an X-ray view of the world," the director explains.³ According to screenwriter Morew: "It's like walking down the street with an architect who knows how everything was built...elite hackers see the world just under the skin, all computer systems and linkups!"³

WHAT TO WEAR TO A HACKING

For the hackers themselves, Softley had costume designer Roger Burton follow the current trend of techno-wear. "The New York and U.K. club scene is really into cyber fashion right now," Softley says.⁴ Scouring second-hand clothing stores, thrift shops—and even street-side vendors' tables—for clothing with a credible 'street' look, Burton combined what he found with original designs to set the characters of the hackers a breed apart. "None of the kids are particularly rich," said Burton, "so it made sense that they would shop in thrift shops and such to customize their own look."³ That look ranges from what Burton calls "the post-cyberpunk, apocalyptic, almost paramilitary"³ clothing worn by Dade, the legendary, unofficial leader of the hackers played by Jonny Lee Miller, to the somewhat conflicted costuming of Kate, Dade's love interest played by Angelina Jolie. Though her clothing generally reflects a defiant androgyny to 'play down' her femininity, Kate later gives way to wearing a beautiful kimono dress... with heavy boots, of course. ■ Every bit as important as the hackers' clothing were their accessories. After all, Softley says: "They carry laptop [computers] like the previous generation carried electric guitars."⁵ Co-producer Janet Graham adds: "Their toys are a distinct part of their wardrobe. They have beepers, laptops, etc. The way kids once personalized guitars, these kids personalize their computers."³ All of the thought behind the 'rave' wear proved worthwhile when it won some of its own rave reviews: The Village Voice's Amy Taubin exclaimed: "Great clothes! Special praise to Roger Burton's medieval-mixed-with-athletic-wear costumes. I coveted every one!"



BATTLE OF THE TECH-WORK STARS

Ultimately, however, the most important accessory in *Hackers* is knowledge. As the hackers, with handle names like "Zero Cool" (Miller's Dade) and "Acid Burn" (Jolie's Kate), are framed by a corporate cutthroat named "The Plague" (Fisher Stevens' Eugene), they have to combine their considerable skills to bring him down...but The Plague is a master hacker as well. "A hacker's true quest," says Stevens, "is not materialistic; they're after knowledge and information. My character... has gone beyond that. He thinks he's gone as far as he can go, so he might as well get paid for it. He sees Dade as an obstacle, but he also understands him...he once *was* him."³

■ The pulse-pounding battle between The Plague and the hackers could not, however, be restricted to laptops – otherwise *Hackers* would have become a movie about sitting. So in addition to undergoing extensive crash-courses in typing and computer skills, Softley had the actors take what turned out to literally be a crash-course in rollerblading for the action-packed sequences late in the film. "One of the things I tried to bring to the movie,"

Softley said, "was the sense that here was a colorful, passionate, sexy, energetic, fast-paced, adrenaline-driven world that audiences would want to visit for a while."³ Softley succeeded in a big way. *Hackers*, said Roger Ebert, is "smart and entertaining, well-directed, written and acted." The Hollywood *Drama-Logue* lauded its "appealing young cast and snazzy visual style." *Time Out* said that *Hackers* is "tense and exciting [and] brilliantly captures the energy and insolence of virtual teen rebellion," while the *Village Voice* called it "techno savvy [with] lots of attitude, amusing dialogue, winning performances and an abundance of computer animation providing an imaginative landscape." *The Chicago Reader* praised the film as "an engaging and lively exploitation fantasy-thriller." American Urban Radio Network's Ron Brewington hailed it as "an extraordinary, stunning spectacle – a must-see of stupendous thrills!" So, finally, in the words of KATU-TV's Randall Blaum: "Sit down, shut up and hang on! *Hackers* is a roller-coaster ride of fun and excitement!"

HACKERS HACKED!

When MGM/UA set up a website for *Hackers*, it was like dangling candy in front of a child. Soon after the site was established, it was hacked! A group calling itself the Internet Liberation Front managed to "doodle" all over the photograph of *Hackers* stars Angelina Jolie and Jonny Lee Miller, and replaced the verbiage, "this is going to be an entertaining, fun promotional site for a movie," with "this is going to be a lame, cheesy promotional site for a movie!" The studio good-naturedly decided to maintain the site during the theatrical run of the movie in its altered form.



JUST THE PHAX, MA'AM

In an homage to the telephone, which opens so many doors for them, hackers often substitute the device's 'ph' into any 'f' word. Phrases like "downloading philes," "surphing" and "phreaking" (illegally 'tricking' phone lines into giving one phree access) abound in the hacker's vernacular!



SURFING USA

The Wall Street Journal recently reported that approximately 62 million Americans — about 30% of us aged 16 or older — use the internet. Of those, 25% were new to the net in 1997. Online usage has increased from 17% of homes in 1996 to 23% just one year later! And America Online serves approximately 675,000 users during peak usage hours, and 11 million customers overall — a number that exceeds the readership of *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and *USA Today* combined! ■ Other interesting facts revealed in the article include that 58% of all net users are male (but that, of those new to the net in 1997, the male/female split was even), that 43% of net users have a college education (12% higher than in the general populace) and that the average user makes about \$55,000 a year (but that 18% of web users make \$75,000 — a significant 14% higher than in the general populace)!

THAT OL' HACK MAGIC GOT ME IN ITS SPELL

Despite the computer-savvy feel of *Hackers*, Iain Softley did not employ any computer animation to achieve the "movie magic" of special effects. "We used the more conventional methods of motion control, animation, models and rotoscoping to create a real, three-dimensional world, because, in my opinion, computer graphics alone can sometimes lend a more flat, sterile image."³



1. *Time Out*, London, 1/4/95
2. *Screen International*, 1/6/95
3. Original Theatrical Press Materials
4. *The Hollywood Reporter*, 8/29/95
5. *The Hollywood Reporter*, 9/14/94

CAST

Dade	JONNY LEE MILLER
Kate	ANGELINA JOLIE
Joey	JESSE BRADFORD
Cereal	MATTHEW LILLARD
Nikon	LAURENCE MASON
Phreak	RENOLY SANTIAGO
The Plague	FISHER STEVENS
Margo	LORRAINE BRACCO
Razor	DARREN LEE
Blade	PETER Y. KIM

HACKERS is offered in the widescreen format, enabling you to experience the picture exactly as it was originally shown in theatres. Depending on how the film was shot, the widescreen format presents up to 50% more image to the left and right of the screen than the standard "pan & scan" process, thus preserving the director's vision of each scene. Black bars at the top and bottom of the screen are normal for this format.



The widescreen version of this MGM DVD has been encoded to take full advantage of high-resolution "widescreen" television sets. When viewed on this type of television, the film's picture resolution will be significantly increased.



This MGM DVD has been encoded with one or more Dolby Digital soundtracks. Dolby Digital is the sound system featured in state-of-the-art movie theatres, and when used with a Dolby Digital receiver, is capable of delivering up to 5.1 separate channels of sound into the home environment, creating a theatre-like, fully enveloping sound experience.

SCENE SELECTIONS

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|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Logo/Sentencing | 12. Joey Gets Busted | 23. "It's A Worm" |
| 2. Main Title | 13. Leonardo Da Virus | 24. Hamikaze Kate |
| 3. TV Takeover | 14. Zero Cool Discovered | 25. Discovering Da Virus |
| 4. Crossing Wires & Mom | 15. When Crash Meets Burn | 26. Razor & Blade |
| 5. Hate Plays Dirty Pool | 16. Profiling Dade | 27. Hack The Planet |
| 6. The Phreak... & Joey | 17. "Risk Is Good"/The Bet | 28. A New Virus |
| 7. Outscoring Hate | 18. The Dress & The Dream | 29. Getting The Worm |
| 8. A New Leak In Town | 19. "The New World Order" | 30. Nabbed By Feds |
| 9. Back At Cyberdelia | 20. Phreak & The Fuzz | 31. Cereal's TV Debut |
| 10. Joey Hacks The Plague | 21. Hate Comes Over | 32. The Swim/End Credits |
| 11. At Lord Nikon's | 22. Plague Threatens Dade | |

UNITED ARTISTS PICTURES Presents An IAIN SOFTLEY Film "HACKERS"
 JONNY LEE MILLER • ANGELINA JOLIE • FISHER STEVENS and LORRAINE BRACCO
 Music by SIMON BOSWELL Edited by CHRISTOPHER BLUNDEN MARTIN WALSH
 Production Designer JOHN BEARD Director of Photography ANTORZEJ SEKULA
 Executive Producer IAIN SOFTLEY Co-Producer JANET GRAHAM Written by RAFAEL MOREU
 Produced by MICHAEL PEYSER RALPH WINTER Directed by IAIN SOFTLEY 
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